

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T LAGOS 001743

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2015

TAGS: CASC FAIR NI ASEC PTER PREL

SUBJECT: BELLVIEW CRASH: AVIATION MINISTER ACCEPTS

ADDITIONAL FORENSIC ASSISTANCE

REF: LAGOS 1734 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (S) Aviation Minister Borishade met Consul General to discuss next steps in the investigation of the crash, given our concerns regarding the plane fragment recently found (reftel). The Minister stated he had briefed President Obasanjo on the new evidence. According to Borishade, the President had instructed the Director of the State Security Service (SSS) to form a small team of his best forensic explosives experts to lead the criminal aspects of the investigation. Borishade added that a perimeter fence around the site and additional police support were being provided. In light of the new evidence, Consul General informed Borishade we were bringing in additional USG explosives and fingerprint forensic experts to help. The Minister assented to this augmentation. The Minister agreed to our suggestion to convene a coordination meeting between the SSS and the additional USG forensics experts upon their arrival.

¶2. (S) The Minister agreed that, in light of continuing uncertainty about the cause of the crash and also as a precaution against compromising any aspect of this investigation, information about the new evidence must be kept confidential until thoroughly investigated. He agreed that any public statements would not touch on the details of any evidentiary findings but would be general statements that the investigation was ongoing and that any factual conclusions would have to wait until the investigation was over.

¶3. (S) Minister Borishade stressed it was essential for the Nigerian aviation industry that something constructive come out of the tragedy, and that his Ministry would need help to implement the lessons learned during the investigation to avoid mistakes in the future.

¶4. (S) Turning to the condition of the Lagos airport runway, Borishade said he is considering hiring experienced airport operations management personnel from abroad to oversee the international airports at Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and Kano, out of concern the necessary expertise is not available in Nigeria. Borishade has discussed this with the President, who agreed, but adequate funding must be provided. (Note: In a November 8 courtesy call, incoming British Deputy High Commissioner told Consul General that British Airways and other European-based international carriers serving Lagos were seriously considering cancelling that service until the lone barely functioning runway was resurfaced. He stated that the High Commission, joined by his Spanish, Italian, German and Dutch counterparts, was going to make this demarche to President Obasanjo in the next week or two. End note).

¶5. (S) Comment: The discovery of evidence of a possible explosion has finally registered on the Minister the need to tighten security and control access to the crash site. The ready acceptance of additional USG forensic support is an additional sign that GON recognizes it needs help if it ever hopes to unravel this unfortunate and tragic puzzle. End Comment.

BROWNE